

Real or faux?

November 3, 2017



While most of the Museum's 1,500+ artifacts are authentic, a few are not. Like many other museums, the Bradbury has a few things that are not true to the time period they are meant to represent but are kept as "educational resources."

Not all inauthentic items (here or elsewhere) are meant to trick people into thinking they are genuine. There are legitimate replicas that are intended as souvenirs or generated for other "non-deceptive" purposes. In some cases, as pieces pass from one person to another, their history gets distorted, and what is understood about them in the present can be a far cry from what they actually are.

Of course, there are those people who misrepresent items as real when they know they are not. In fact, over the years unscrupulous persons have made money selling fakes, and the faux items have been detected only years later.

How to spot a fake

While this is far from the definitive guide, there are a few things that can help you identify non-counterfeited items.

— *Be wary of anything you can't examine firsthand.*



For instance, someone donated what was said to be a sample of trinitite (a substance that resulted from the 1945 Trinity Test, the first test of an atomic weapon). While we're pretty sure it's not trinitite, we can't be absolutely sure because the sample is encased in Lucite, which limits our ability to test it. (See the image to the left.)

We also have a small cardboard card that was said to be from the Trinity Test, but the card has been laminated, so the paper it's printed on cannot be examined.

Hint: Never laminate or otherwise protectively enclose an artifact in a way that cannot be undone. Such "protection" is actually considered damage by collections specialists.

– *Do your research.*

Anytime you want to collect something, particularly if you're looking at a large expenditure, learn something about the collectibles in that particular category. For instance, the card mentioned above looks as if it may have been replicated on a color copier. Unless you can spot the signs that reveal the difference between a reproduction and the genuine article, it would be best to steer clear.

Are there similar items available for sale or examination on the Web? It would be wise to know if there are replicas out there that might be mistaken for the real thing. In many collecting categories, there are tutorials available to help discern the difference between authentic items and replicas.

– *Examine the item closely.*

Many fakes have one thing in common, and that's poor workmanship. Metal seams that have not been properly buffed, lack of detail, and signs of other sloppy work could mean you have a replica and not the real thing.

Have something to donate to the Museum?

Do you have something you would like to contribute to our collection? If so, contact our collections specialist at wstromeyer@lanl.gov with a photograph and description of the item(s).

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